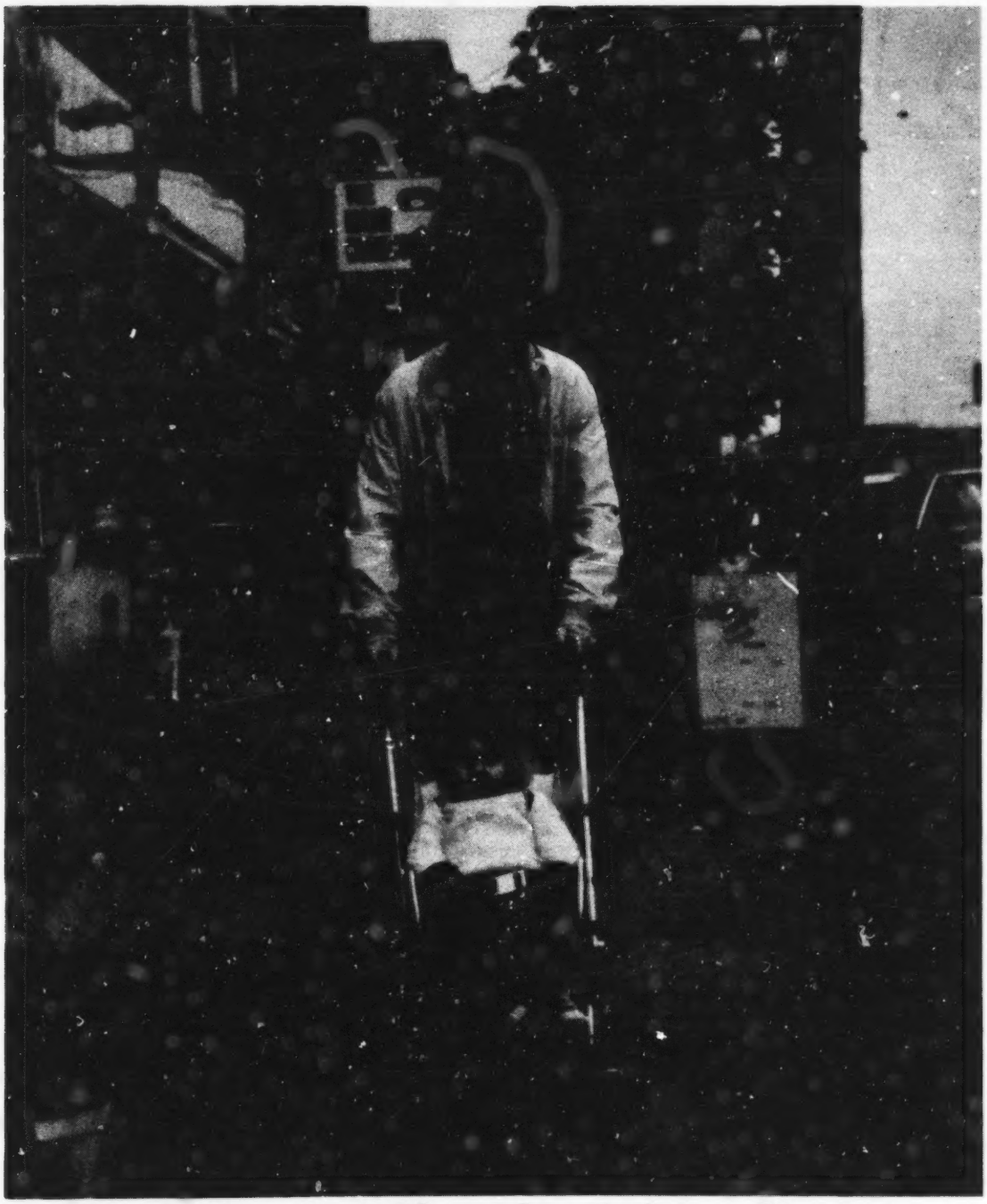
SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF METROPOLITAN TORONTO

UNEMPLOYED FATHERS



Parenting In A Changing Labour Market

A participant in the United Way

UNEMPLOYED FATHERS:

Parenting in a Changing Labour Market

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This report is based on in-depth personal interviews with unemployed fathers living in Metropolitan Toronto and vicinity. Descriptive quotes from these interviews have been used throughout this text. In the interest of confidentiality, there have been some deliberate alterations made in the information identifying these men and their families.

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The screening and interviewing of respondents for this study was conducted by a team including: Ava Szczurko, Project Manager; Kirk Brown; and Nancy Fragale. This project team also participated in the design of the research instrument and the coding, data entry, and analysis of the survey data. Data entry was supervised by Linda Stanhope of Erindale College, University of Toronto. Linda Stanhope also assisted with the computer analysis of the survey data.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a growing interest in paternal participation in child rearing and child care. In North America the popular media as well as the social scientific research literature have devoted considerable attention to fathers' changing and growing role in bringing up children. To date, most of the attention has been focused on families in which fathers' increased involvement in child care has been voluntary. Such families would include those in which employed fathers, or perhaps both employed parents, have flexible work schedules. In some cases, fathers voluntarily opt to stay at home with young children on a full-time basis -- so called "househusbands". Single fathers are another group with a high level of participation in child care, a group that has been the subject of attention by both popular media and researchers.

Results of the investigations of highly participant fathers are encouraging about the benefits of such patterns of family life for fathers, for their children, and for employed mothers. Men's discovery of the rewards of high levels of involvement in parenting is viewed as evidence of their liberation from the constraints of traditional, stereotypical sex roles.

Current high rates of prime age male unemployment in Canada are producing another category of father with a high level of involvement in child care -- the unemployed father. While not yet the subject of television "sitcoms" or extensive research interest, this stay-at-home father is a characteristic pattern in an increasing number of Canadian families.

Significant numbers of Canadian families now have an unemployed father and an employed mother. Of necessity, rather than by choice, many of these fathers remain at home to provide care for infants, pre-school, and young school-age children. In Canada in 1983 there were at least 48,000 unemployed fathers in families with pre-school age children and employed wives. Some 18,000 of these unemployed fathers live in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 1983).

What effect does unemployment have upon these men and their families? In particular, do these fathers find the shift from traditional breadwinning roles to be a liberating experience, a positive opportunity to develop a close relationship with their children? Or, alternatively, do these men find the burden of child care responsibility to be an added source of stress and difficulty at a time when their employment role has been disrupted and their future employment plans have become uncertain? This study has been conducted to answer these and other questions about unemployed fathers, and to provide a general description of the circumstances faced by these men and their families.

Consequences of Paternal Unemployment For Families: The Research Evidence

Depression era studies, largely based on individual family case studies, found that unemployment in the 1930s had negative consequences for family relationships and functioning (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938; Liem & Liem, 1978; Moen, 1983). The few more recent studies tend to support earlier findings of disrupted family life following unemployment.

An American study by Liem and Rayman (1982) found that negative consequences for wives of unemployed men increased with length of unemployment. One month after unemployment, wives of the unemployed were somewhat more depressed than wives of the employed, but there were no other significant differences between the two groups. By four months after unemployment, wives of the unemployed were significantly more depressed, anxious, and sensitive about interpersonal relationships. The unemployed respondents in Liem and Rayman's research also reported signs of stress in their children, including moodiness and problems in school and in peer relationships. A British pilot study by Fagin and Little (1981) reported similar results.

Research by Thomas, McCabe and Berry (1980) suggests that the negative consequences of paternal unemployment may be less severe among managerial and professional groups with somewhat older children. Asked, "How has your being unemployed affected your relationship with your spouse?" almost half (48%) of these middle-aged respondents reported no change, about one-third (37%) reported a negative effect, while 15% reported some positive effect. Only 17% of these fathers reported that unemployment had adverse effects on their relationships with their children. This finding suggests that, not surprisingly, a family's economic resources may cushion the impact of unemployment.

Some research attention has been directed at the possible connection between labour market patterns and rates of child abuse. Steinberg, Catalano, and Dooley (1981) report a relationship between declines in the work force and reported child abuse in two U.S. metropolitan communities.

Justice and Duncan (1977) describe an increased risk of child abuse for a number of populations, including unemployed fathers caring for their children at home. Kirsh (1983), in a report on unemployment issued by the Canadian Mental Health Association, notes the association between the social isolation characteristic of unemployment and child abuse.

In summary, while there is growing consensus that unemployment is a major social problem, there is relatively little research evidence on the direct effects of paternal unemployment on family life in general and on children in particular. The evidence that does exist suggests a number of areas of potential problems, some factors that may exacerbate the negative impacts of unemployment, as well as factors that may cushion such effects. In fact, the conclusions from available research give considerable cause for concern about the social effects of paternal unemployment. The findings that married men experience particularly high levels of psychological distress from unemployment (Hakim, 1982), that negative consequences for families increase with duration of fathers' unemployment, that financial insecurity may increase the stress associated with unemployment, and the possible association between unemployment and child abuse, all suggest that paternal unemployment may have a serious, negative impact on family life.

1. METHODS

The following is a brief, general description of the research methods used in this study. A more detailed description of the study methods appears in Appendix A of this report.

This study is based on in-depth personal interviews with a sample of thirty currently or recently unemployed fathers of young children. The survey is viewed as exploratory and descriptive in nature, with the key objective being to document the characteristics of this little known, little studied segment of the population.

The sample was recruited through a variety of methods including a screening survey, community outreach, advertising through the news media, and referrals from respondents ("snowball sampling"). Table 1 in Appendix B of this report identifies the relative proportions of the sample recruited by each technique.

Interviews of approximately one and one-half hours' duration were conducted in person, generally in respondents' homes. A combination of structured and open-ended questions probed each father's employment history and socio-demographic background, attitudes toward employment and unemployment, and household division of labour. The interview asked specifically about the fathers' relationships with their young children.

2. THE FATHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The study sample consists of thirty currently or recently unemployed fathers living in the vicinity of Metropolitan Toronto. Twenty-four of the fathers were currently unemployed; six were recently employed following a period of unemployment. Unemployment, for purposes of this study, is defined as not working despite wanting, being available for, and actively seeking paid employment.

For currently unemployed respondents, questions relating to unemployment were asked pertaining to their current unemployment experience. Those with recent unemployment experiences were asked questions with regard to their most recent period of unemployment.

The preliminary analysis of the survey data indicated no substantive difference between these two subgroups, the currently and recently unemployed. For this reason, the two have been combined in the analysis, and, throughout the text of this report, they are referred to collectively as the sample of unemployed fathers.

All thirty of the sampled unemployed fathers have at least one child of preschool age -- from infancy through age six. All but one of the fathers live with a spouse or a partner (twenty-five are married, four are living common law). One respondent has recently separated and has a shared child custody arrangement. In all but two families, the respondent's wife or partner is employed full or part-time. The wife of one unemployed respondent is a full-time student, another wife is unemployed. In seven of the families, the wife's employment appeared to

be a response to her husband's job loss. That is, the wife began her employment within three months of the date of her husband's unemployment.

In just over half of the families, the father (n=16) serves as the primary caregiver for his preschool children during the period of unemployment. Other families utilize care by day care centres, relatives, sitters and half-day school programs.

The fathers in this study are a highly diverse group with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. They range in age from 19 to 45 years, with an average of 33 years. As shown in Table 2, their educational backgrounds range from some (n=8) who had not graduated from high school, to four with post-graduate and professional degrees.

The families in the study sample also represent a wide range of economic levels. Table 3, Appendix B, describes the distribution of the total annual family incomes both prior to and following the father's unemployment. At the lower end of the income range are families who, before unemployment, had total annual family incomes under $10,000. At the upper end of the income distribution are families with annual incomes of at least $45,000.

In the majority of cases, the father's unemployment resulted in a significant decrease in total family income. The overall downward shift in income following fathers' unemployment is evident from an examination of Table 3. There are some instances, however, in which the father's unemployment insurance benefits and/or the addition of the

mother's earnings serve to either keep the total family income at the previous level (5 cases) or raise it above the level prior to the father's unemployment (2 cases).

The sampled fathers also reflect a range of ethnic diversity. Fourteen of the respondents identified themselves as Canadians; five as Chinese or other Far East-Asian, three consider themselves to be British; two are Portuguese, and one each is Italian, Spanish, Algerian, Latvian, Philippino and Hungarian.

As might be expected based on their various educational backgrounds, the fathers' work histories also reflect considerable range and diversity. Some were unskilled or semi-skilled workers; some held jobs as skilled tradesmen; a number were in sales; and still others held either professional, technical or managerial positions. Table 4 reports the occupational distribution based on respondents' most recent employment experience.

While some of the fathers had worked only part-time prior to becoming unemployed, the great majority (24 cases) had held full-time jobs. Most (19 fathers) had held jobs that were considered permanent positions. Only eight of the respondents had been union members.

Most of the fathers had become unemployed through lay-offs, termination or non-renewal of contracts. Table 5 presents the reasons given by respondents for their job loss. The average duration of their unemployment is 7 months.

At the time of the interview, 23 of the 24 unemployed fathers reported being actively involved in a search for full-time employment. Asked whether they would accept a full-time job if it were offered tomorrow, virtually all answered in the affirmative.

3. LOSING AT BREADWINNING

> "Superficially, there's more time to do things. You putter around, but don't really do anything, you end up doing trivial things. You get a 6-pack if you can afford it, watch Archie Bunker -- atrophy sets in. With a job you can plan, but I can't do that now."

Unemployment represents a major shock and upheaval in the lives of the men interviewed in this study. At the very least, it requires a redefinition of roles and responsibilities within the family and the household. For most, however, the change from hard hat to apron has serious consequences for their feelings about themselves. In response to the question "How do you feel about being unemployed?", almost all (n=27) of the fathers were completely or mainly negative. Only two were mostly positive. The experience of joblessness can shake a man's self-confidence and undermine his hopes and plans for the future. The rules of the game seem to change, and some of these unemployed fathers lose a sense of mastery over their environment, and over their own lives:

> "I like to be in total control of myself; everything seems to be out of my reach now."

Feelings of frustration, depression, boredom and anxiety about the future characterize many of the fathers' responses to unemployment. Tied to the home by their child care and household responsibilities, many define their daily lives as empty, boring and unfulfilling. For some, the very boredom of the daily routine at home saps them of the energy or motivation to pursue any activity. Without the structure of accustomed work obligations and responsibilities, some find themselves incapable of organizing their time. Two of the fathers express this sentiment:

> "I don't like the boredom. Every day there's a certain amount of boredom. I have to get out and do something -- I can't let it take hold."

> "I have too much time on my hands, and as a result, things don't get done.

A third father, at home with a three-year-old child, enumerates the things that are wrong with the daily routine of his life:

> "Not being in touch with other people; no social contact; not having a structured day or schedule; not having to use my brain."

The connection between boredom and feelings of depression is made by a number of the men interviewed. In the words of one:

> "I feel very depressed and sad; there is too much time to kill; I feel useless."

Still another jobless father links his feelings about his unemployment to some physiological consequences:

> "I don't like to stay home -- I get sick and I get fat. I am worried, I do not feel good, I cannot sleep as well. It's hard to fill the time."

The fathers' descriptions of their own daily routines while unemployed also suggest that some of these men may be somewhat depressed. The survey included a list of activities and asked respondents to indicate

whether they spent more, less, or the same amount of time in each since becoming unemployed.* Almost one-third of those answering the question (n=8) report an increase in time spent sleeping since becoming unemployed. Even more fathers (n=11) report spending more time watching television since becoming unemployed. This increase in sleeping and television viewing suggests that at least some of the fathers react to their job loss with some degree of passivity.

Another dominant theme in the fathers' accounts is a self doubt which results from their failure in the job marketplace. For many, their whole sense of individual worth and personal identity is closely tied to their employment role. The stripping away of that work role, combined with failed attempts to re-establish a connection to the workplace, makes these men unsure of themselves and of their abilities. One of the fathers describes these feelings:

> "You start to feel useless, frustrated, depressed -- you send out resumes and applications, and the employers don't even bother to call you back."

Another father offers a highly analytical description of the feelings that occur:

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*This set of activity questions was added to the questionnaire after some of the interviews had been completed. Despite efforts to re-interview initial respondents, these data are available for only 25 of the 30 respondents.

> "It's demoralizing; I've felt alienated from society in that I couldn't fit in. There is a loss of pride, dignity, and self-worth -- and an enormous stress quotient which affects the whole family, which is just a mirror of what's going on. There's diminished self-esteem and self-worth."

There may be a temptation for some fathers to throw themselves into the housekeeper role, and to expect the same sense of achievement that accompanied their previous employment role. One of the fathers in the sample describes how he succumbed to the temptation to prove himself by demonstrating competence in housekeeping -- and warns other stay-at-home fathers of the potential folly of such an ambition:

> "Housework becomes really important, you want to prove yourself. I can see men trying to apply work-like methods to housework - a small project to prove yourself on. It's the hardest thing, it's the last straw. You're sitting in a mess when you're unemployed. You'd like to think at least you're sitting in a comfortable house, but you can't get to all the housework. It's a vicious circle. You sit in a depressing house, and get more and more depressed ... It's dangerous to think this way. My advice to other full-time fathers is: Don't worry about the mess. After leaving the workforce, housework is the last thing to apply method to."

The experience of unemployment causes some of the fathers to question their own self-worth. There are also some who perceive themselves to be stigmatized by the community at large. Although only seven respondents spontaneously described themselves as feeling stigmatized, these feelings seem quite powerful. They feel that neighbours, friends, the general public, all view them as lazy, or as failures. Perhaps the

unemployed do, in fact, receive cues that others think they are lazy, incompetent, or otherwise worthy of blame. Neighbours and friends may convey more or less subtle messages that they think able-bodied men should be out earning a living. One father describes the strain he feels from others' criticism of his current status:

> "If you're a man, it's enough to bring you down. I run into people in the store and they say, 'you must be on vacation.' I say, 'no, I take care of my daughter.' Then they back off."

Regardless of whether the message originates from external sources, or whether it comes from the fathers' own self-doubt, many do feel that others are critical of them for being at home. The social stigma of unemployment can become deeply impressed upon its victims, and can be a source of strain.

One unemployed father describes how being the only male adult in a public setting can mark him as one of the unemployed.

> "There is a loss of social identification, going to the pool and being the only man around and having people wondering, 'what is he doing here?'"

Another father is more specific with regard to a perceived image of the unemployed as lazy:

> "How do you deal with the social image of laziness? You become suspicious of everyone -- you wonder, 'what are they thinking about me?'"

Like the father above, who senses public criticism when he goes swimming, another unemployed father feels conspicuous when travelling by bicycle:

> "I feel like people see me as lazy. We use bikes, since we can't afford to take public transit. I feel like people think you are lazy or spending time leisurely."

The sense that the public is watching, critically, every time one ventures outside can make for a very lonely existence for these fathers and the children in their care. One unemployed father of a three-year-old puts it plainly:

> "I don't want to sit at home. It's anti-social -- you're on your own. You lock yourself up -- you don't want neighbours to see you're unemployed."

Another of the fathers describes the sense of shame and embarrassment associated with his own feelings about his unemployment.

> "I felt ashamed -- that was a biggie. When I went to a Canada Employment Centre, I saw two of my neighbours there. I felt embarrassed, I don't know if they did."

The fathers' description of changes in their daily routines since unemployment gives one explanation of the source of feelings of social isolation. For many, unemployment does result in a decrease in social contact with former workmates and with friends. About half (n=13) of the 25 fathers for whom data are available report a decrease in the amount of

time spent with former workmates since becoming unemployed; only two fathers report any increase in time spent with former workmates.

More to the point are the fathers' descriptions of changes in patterns of socializing with their friends. While it might be expected that the loss of the job role would be associated with reduced social contact with former workmates, it does not follow that friendships would be similarly affected. Yet seven of the fathers report a decrease in such social contact following unemployment. These seven represent a minority -- the remaining eighteen fathers answering this question reported either an increase or no change in time spent with friends. The minority of seven may be those most seriously affected by their job loss.

4. DADDY'S HOME!

"He's my little buddy. We're not afraid to say we love each other."

"I'd rather be working!"

While just over half (n=16) of the unemployed fathers have major responsibility for child care, full-time parenting is not the first choice of most of the fathers interviewed. When asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statement: "I would rather be a full-time father than be employed outside the home," more than three-quarters (23 fathers) express disagreement. Thirteen of these indicate that they disagree very strongly with the statement. Of those remaining, only three agree, while the remaining four fathers decline to express a preference.

A number of the fathers comment on the difficulties associated with providing child care. Some simply don't have much previous experience with or knowledge of child care. Particularly when dealing with young infants, such lack of preparation and experience can present problems. An unemployed father of a three-year-old reflects on his entry into the role of child care provider:

"I didn't feel prepared for doing child care; didn't know anything about kids at all."

A father who cares for a one-year-old infant also stresses his lack of knowledge and preparation:

> "I think the most negative aspect is that fathers don't know how to deal with children at home."

From another father whose youngest child is one year of age:

> "I just don't have the confidence in being at home with the kids."

In contrast, a recently-employed father whose family background had included experience in the care of young siblings, looks back more positively at his experience caring for his own youngsters during a period of unemployment:

> "It was O.K. I came from a big family, I had to care for my little brothers and sisters. I like kids. My children liked it; I know because when I started to work they cried and said, 'Daddy, stay at home, we want to play with you.'"

Many of the fathers do seem to derive considerable pleasure and sense of fulfillment from their relationships with young children. In response to the question "Are there things you like about being unemployed?" half of the fathers (n=16) mention being with their children, getting to know their children, or doing specific activities with their children. Thus, for some fathers, their children provide some compensation for the otherwise negative state of being unemployed. However a number of the fathers do express resentment at being forced into the role of child care provider. They see this as a low status role, one not highly valued in society. The transition from wage earner to "babysitter" is a difficult one.

> "I don't like it. I would prefer to work. Without the wife working, we couldn't manage. I'm mainly taking the place of a babysitter. I don't like babysitting, I'm out to get a job really."

And from another father:

> "I'd rather work than be here to babysit ... I don't like babysitting, and I'm not big on housework either."

Some of the unemployed fathers question their own competence to assume responsibility for child care and housework. Their concerns may be expressed in terms of sex-role stereotyping, i.e. roles better filled by males or females. More typically, however, the fathers simply dwell upon their own personal limitations.

> "I'm not that good with babies; you think you've got everything covered, and the baby's still crying. I wouldn't choose this life-style ... When a crisis comes up, that's when it gets scary ... I'm not as good in a crisis with a child as with an adult. I don't like housework, don't like dishes and if I do the laundry, I ruin things."

Patience with their children is a quality some of the fathers feel that they lack. It should be noted however, that most respondents judge themselves to be "good" parents on the whole. Twenty-two of the fathers rated themselves positively, while only five were mainly or entirely negative in their self assessment. The fathers' most common self criticism relates to their shortness of temper and insufficient patience (ten of the fathers mentioned these shortcomings).

In fact, some of their accounts of their caregiving do suggest that patience is a quality which may be in short supply. One father of a young toddler describes how the child's early morning activity makes him feel nervous:

> "He moves around too much and gets on my nerves early in the morning; I can't relax much."

A father of a young boy offers the following observation about his parenting:

> "There are instances where I should act more logically than emotionally. It depends on your day. I'm less likely to jump on his face if he's been good all day."

Some fathers consider patience to be a feminine quality, and believe that fathers, in general, are therefore less suited to child care. (One respondent even used the phrase "motherly patience.") Other fathers interviewed connected their short-temperedness to the stress associated with joblessness:

> "I get anxious about not working, tend to get impatient with kids, a little short-tempered where I normally wouldn't be."

Financial worries and uncertainty about the future are seen to reduce fathers' capacity to remain patient and even-tempered with their children. For some fathers, the uncertainty of their future employment prospects

robs them of the ability to enjoy the time with their young children. According to one father:

> "You don't feel the joy of spending time with children."

One of the difficulties associated with their child care responsibility is that it can interfere with the fathers' chances to pursue employment opportunities when these arise. Half (8 out of 16) of the fathers who are primary caretakers mentioned this as a problem in response to questions about child care arrangements and perceived needs. Aside from the motivational problems of conducting an active job search, these caregiving fathers also face logistical obstacles, should they wish to apply for job openings or go for a job interview. One cannot show up for an interview accompanied by a young child -- yet most of the fathers do not have access to reliable back-up child care arrangements. One of the fathers puts it very plainly:

> "It's hard to wear two hats in the same day, job searcher and caregiver."

For most of the fathers who describe this problem, it is the job searching activity that is compromised. Some feel that the only way to approach job-hunting seriously is to do it on a full-time basis. Pressures and demands of child care prevent that. The frustration is evident in the following response to a survey question about the current child care arrangement:

> "I think it's disgusting. You can't find a job if you have to stay home and look after children. It's a Catch-22."

Some of the unemployed fathers do utilize substitute child care arrangements to enable them to seek employment. Some use formal, paid arrangements with day care centres -- arrangements that were made when they were still employed. Others use informal arrangements, either on a full or part-time basis, with sitters or with relatives. Most of those using such arrangements see them as a necessity. According to one father whose three-year-old attends a day care centre:

> "The worst scenario would be the child at home with the father. There is a need to look for work, and a need for money. They need day care."

The importance of substitute child care -- whether for purposes of job search, or just for relief from the pressures of child care -- is evident from the following statement by another of the fathers:

> "If a person under stress is put into a child care situation, he'll go mad. A good child care arrangement helps relieve that stress."

While many of the fathers acknowledge their need for child care of some sort, it is most unusual for them to think in terms of any sort of cooperative or shared arrangements with other fathers. In many communities, such informal babysitting cooperatives or playgroups are commonly organized by mothers who are home on a part-time or full-time basis. It is generally recognized that such arrangements are beneficial to the mothers, who may

require time to themselves for a variety of reasons, as well as being advantageous to the children, by providing opportunities for social interaction with age peers.

Only one of the sampled fathers actually organized such an informal arrangement. This unemployed father, the parent of a child of junior kindergarten age, describes what he terms a 'reciprocal arrangement':

> "I set it up with three different parents and we rotate amongst ourselves. It seems to work out quite well for my son. He has a greater variety of experiences; he gets to visit his friends and play there, and it's quite exciting for him. I find the situation works quite well. It gives me the time that I need -- it gives me flexibility because there are times when I have to do something without my son being around. I didn't want to pay, and the best way is to have a reciprocal arrangement ..."

Another unemployed father in the sample got only as far as fantasizing about such a cooperative child care plan:

> "It would have been helpful ... if I could have made arrangements with a group of fathers looking for work and doing child care. We could have pooled resources and have had one father look after three children instead of one child, so the other fathers could go job hunting."

Perhaps it is the stigma of their unemployed status which prevents these fathers from actually making such cooperative arrangements. Alternatively, it may simply be that those whose children do not yet attend school lack the opportunity to meet other parents in the community. Regardless of

whether social, psychological, or purely logistical factors account for the observed pattern, the result is that many of the unemployed fathers encounter considerable difficulty providing solo child care.

Despite their own difficulties associated with becoming child care providers, there are a number of fathers who feel that their children do benefit from their care. The fathers are almost evenly divided when asked whether or not their unemployment has been good for their children.

When asked about the effects of their own caregiving on their children, the fathers tend, on the whole, to be positive. One father states categorically that his child fares better than he does in the arrangement:

> "Since I'm unemployed, it's good for the baby, not good for me."

Another father echoes virtually the same sentiment:

> "For me it's a strain. Sometimes I'd like to go out -- it's good for my child, but not for me."

Reflecting on their overall situations, some of the fathers are able to factor out the various elements of their changed routines -- joblessness, child care, household responsibilities -- and to evaluate these elements individually. In such instances, it tends to be the child care, and the development of a closer relationship with their children, that is reported to be most rewarding for the fathers. None of the fathers is jobless by choice and few would consider rejecting an offer of employment.

However, as mentioned above, there are a number who do stress the positive aspects of the opportunity to get to know their children. One father who has a half-day day care arrangement for his child describes the pleasure he derives from the time spent with his young son:

> "It's great, he's older now and I see independence streaks coming out. We go to the park, play inside and outside, do letters together. He loves to shop and to help in the garden ... Every day he changes. I will never understand why women want to go to work after they have a child. It's a fascinating period in life."

A recently employed father of a child of kindergarten age looks back enthusiastically on the way in which he was able to fit into the care-giver role. It is interesting to note his use of the phrase "the other mothers on the street who stayed home":

> "My relationship with my child changed. Most fathers don't get a chance to spend a year with their child since the traditional pattern is one of minimal contact. My relationship with other kids on the street improved -- they started to regard me as one of the other mothers on the street who stayed home."

There are also fathers who, while recognizing the benefits of increased time with their children, still dwell on the overwhelming difficulty of being without a job. This father of a four-year-old indicates his willingness to relinquish exclusive care of his child:

"Not working is the worst thing. I'd like to come home from work and look after her and just know where she's been in the day."

The fathers' responses to the structured questions on satisfaction with child care arrangements, their perceived competence at parenting, the importance they attached to various aspects of parenting and descriptions of their child revealed an interesting pattern. (The correlation matrix is presented in Appendix B, Table 6. Due to the large number of possible correlations, only those significant at the .02 level will be discussed.) There was a positive correlation between fathers' satisfaction with child care arrangements and how good at parenting they rated themselves. Similarly, there was a positive correlation between satisfaction with child care arrangements and how important they rated parenting. Fathers who viewed parenting as important saw themselves as good parents and described their children positively. Those who saw their unemployment as being good for their child were more actively engaged in joint activities with the child. Interestingly, the longer fathers had been unemployed, the less positive was their description of their child.

As noted previously, approximately half of the fathers were the primary caretakers of their children, while the rest had day care, baby-sitting or other child care arrangements. There were some interesting contrasts between these two groups of fathers. (See Appendix B, Table 7 for the correlations.) The groups are very small (16 and 14) and therefore the correlations should be viewed as simply suggestive. It should be noted that there were no differences in income, education, age of child, satisfaction with child care arrangements or overall mean ratings on the parenting

scales for these two groups. The relationship between satisfaction with child care arrangements and how good fathers thought they were as parents was somewhat stronger for the primary caretakers than it was for the other fathers. However, this pattern reversed regarding the relationship between satisfaction with child care arrangements and importance of parenting.

For both groups, the importance of parenting correlated with how well they thought they did as parents, but the relationship between importance of parenting and a positive description of the child held only for those fathers who were primary caretakers.

The most compelling and interesting contrasts involved length of unemployment. For the primary caretakers the correlation between length of unemployment and a more negative child description was substantial, while it was non-significant for the other group. In addition, the longer the primary caretakers were unemployed, the less important they tended to rate parenting skills and the less beneficial they saw their unemployment for their child. (The corresponding correlations for the other fathers were non-significant.)

This result leads to some interesting speculations. Although most of the fathers in the sample were quite positive in rating their parenting and their children, they were uniformly very negative about their unemployment. It is possible that as the months drag on, negative feelings about unemployment begin to "spill over" into the realm of parenting. Perhaps for fathers who are primary caretakers, the role begins to "wear thin," and what was initially an opportunity to get to know one's children, subsequently

becomes something more burdensome. It is interesting to note, in this context, that a larger percentage (38%) of primary caretakers said they took sole responsibility for household tasks than did the other fathers (24%). It is also possible that over time, the children themselves become more difficult to deal with. It should be repeated that these are only correlational data and the numbers are very small. However, even in the context of a group of fathers who are generally positive about their role as parents and about their children, one can detect some possible negative effects of unemployment regarding attitudes in these areas.

5. ALL IN THE FAMILY

> "I can understand why abuse in households increases with unemployment -- you pick on the weak since you yourself are so weak."

Financial strain, uncertainty about future employment prospects, loss of self-esteem, difficulties in assuming new child care responsibilities -- all of these factors can combine to place a heavy burden on the individual unemployed fathers. Over half (n=19) report some degree of financial hardship or need. Not surprisingly, many of the respondents (n=14) also report strains on their marital and familial relationships.

The present study shows that, at the very least, the father's unemployment involves major change and realignment of roles and responsibilities of both partners. In virtually all of these families, the father's job loss resulted in some change in the mother's employment role. In some cases (n=7) the mother's entry into the labour force was a direct result of her husband's unemployment. In other cases, the mother's commitment to her employment increased as a result of her partner's job loss. The combination of financial need and the father's availability for child care made it more feasible for some mothers to become more involved in their work.

Some of the men are quite frank about their resentment of such increased job involvement on the part of a partner. In one instance, a woman became active in her union following her husband's unemployment. He resents the time she now spends at weekly evening union meetings:

> "Just recently she has been unionized and she is actively involved in this. She has evening meetings once a week -- she is on the negotiating team. It makes me angry because I previously refused potential jobs because of late nights or weekends away -- she was insistent about this. Now it's come full circle and because it involves her work situation, things are different -- this makes me angry."

A full-time father may feel that his wife's added involvement in her job means that she has less time for and less interest in her own relationship. The pressures of his wife's high-powered job and a highly child-centered family life combine to leave less time and energy than this father wants for his marital relationship:

> "I'm affectionate. Sometimes I want to hug her and she has so much to do, so much to keep organized, she gets short and says, 'Not now.' It's also important to have time for ourselves with respect to the kids ... sometimes you don't realize it until you're short with one another. Sometimes we forget ourselves -- kids are the number one focus. In the importance of the mother-father roles, we forget that we're wife and husband."

While some fathers worry about their wives' over-involvement in their jobs, others observe their wives' preference for the child caring role. A working mother's wish to be at home with her children may be another source of tension in the family; as illustrated by statements from three of the fathers interviewed:

> "She, I think, is jealous of my being at home. She'd prefer not to work."

> "When I was working, I missed so much ... seeing my child grow. Now it's the wife who's missing it."

> "It's been difficult for her having me home. I think she feels short-changed -- our child responds to me. Although, if there's a real tragedy of some kind, he immediately wants his mother. If it's a real big problem, it's Mommy."

Another father describes how his marital relationship suffered under the strain of his unemployment and the resulting changes in family life:

> "Our marriage has suffered in the last few years. We have problems communicating ... Looking for a job and caring for children, the relationship, the sex life goes down the tubes ..."

An unemployed father of a one-year-old infant describes the difficulty of trying to protect his family life from the frustrations of his joblessness:

> "Moods and tensions invade our personal life. You cannot separate business and personal. Disappointment about job search affects the home life."

There are some unemployed fathers who attribute increased levels of tension and discord in their marriages to their own negative feelings about themselves and their role in the family. The strain of such 'untraditional' family roles is evident from this father's account of his early response to unemployment:

"There was tension between myself and my wife about breadwinning. Conflicts arose about things which were mainly my fault because subconsciously I was experiencing tension about money-making. I had been socialized into the traditional patterns of family life."

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Labour market forces in Canada have created a new form of the family -- one in which the father is unemployed and the mother is employed outside the home. This report has described the results of an exploratory study of some social effects of fathers' unemployment. Using a sample of thirty families with children 6 years of age and under and a currently or recently unemployed father, the research used personal interviews with the fathers to probe the impact of unemployment on themselves and their families.

Following is a summary of the main findings from this exploratory study. It should be stressed once again that, due to the small sample size, these results should be considered suggestive, rather than conclusive.

1. Job loss represents a major shock to the self esteem of the fathers interviewed. Most fathers reacted to unemployment in negative terms, emphasizing the deleterious effects of unemployment on themselves and on other family members. Boredom, depression, and anxiety characterize many fathers' reactions to unemployment.

2. A number of the unemployed fathers feel themselves to be stigmatized and blamed by the community at large. Some report that unemployment results in loneliness and social isolation.

3. Half of the fathers cited opportunities to spend time with their children as one of the few positive consequences of unemployment. Many fathers feel the time spent with their children to be mutually beneficial. On the negative side, some of the unemployed fathers found themselves suddenly thrust into child care and homemaker roles for which they were ill-prepared.

4. Many fathers cite a need for child care services to enable them to search for employment, as well as to have some time to themselves, away from their children.

5. The study found that among fathers who were providing full-time care for their children, there was an association between the duration of the father's

> unemployment and the degree to which he describes his child in negative terms. Specifically, the longer the unemployment, the more negative is the child description. Long-term unemployment and resulting family and household responsibilities may be considerably more stressful for fathers than are shorter-term experiences of this sort. We can speculate that stress on their families may also increase with the duration of fathers' unemployment.

This study has explored the ways in which paternal unemployment can affect a family with young children. Interviews with fathers have revealed a considerable amount of resiliency and flexibility in their willingness to adapt to new roles within the family. At the same time, their accounts reveal the strain which unemployment, particularly prolonged unemployment,can place on all members of a family.

All of the fathers interviewed in this study have thought long and hard about the problem of unemployment. Some offered suggestions of programs or services which might ease their burden. Increased availability of day care was an example of one such program. In the end, however, virtually all of the fathers were in agreement with the father who stated that,

"Only a job will help."

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This research is based on personal interviews with a sample of thirty currently or recently unemployed fathers of young children. The research uses a case study approach involving in-depth interviews to investigate the attitudes and experiences of these men and their families. The study is exploratory and descriptive in nature -- its objective is to document the characteristics of this little-known, little-studied segment of the population.

Project Staff and Volunteers

The project was carried out under the direction of a volunteer committee of the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto. The study was designed and co-ordinated by two project co-directors, a sociologist and a developmental psychologist. Data collection and coding were conducted by a field staff of three summer students. The three students, one male and two females, were all students in the social sciences and all had had some previous interviewing experience.

Sample Selection

Since there was no available sampling frame listing unemployed fathers of young children, the sample was recruited through a variety of techniques, including screening, community outreach, advertising through the news media, and "snowball" sampling (referrals from respondents). Table 1, Appendix B, of this report identifies the relative proportions of the sample recruited by the various techiques.

The largest number of respondents were identified through direct screening using brief personal interviews with randomly selected respondents. Screening interviews were conducted with men in the company of young children. Interviewers approached respondents, informed them that a study was being done to investigate fathers' involvement in child rearing, and requested permission to conduct a brief, background interview.

These screening interviews were conducted in a variety of public places, including shopping malls, parks, playgrounds, and on sidewalks. Screening locations were selected to include a variety of neighbourhoods across Metropolitan Toronto representing a range and variety in socioeconomic status and ethnicity. The screening interview asked for name, address, and telephone number and collected information on family composition and marital status, employment status of respondent and his spouse or partner, and asked for an assessment of the amount of time the respondent provides care for his child or children. Finally, the respondent was asked to indicate whether he would agree to a further, in-depth interview, were he to be selected for inclusion in the study.

The second largest number of respondents for the sample was recruited through what is termed "community outreach" -- the displaying of descriptive flyers and posters in such locations as community centres, parent-child programs, women's centres, libraries, day care and community health centres. These descriptive materials were specifically directed towards the unemployed father. Men fitting the study criteria; i.e. currently or recently unemployed, with children under six years of age and employed wives, were invited to participate in the study and urged to

contact the project office. Respondents who volunteered in this way were provided with descriptive information about the study, and after a brief telephone screening interview, were asked whether, if selected, they would submit to a personal interview. There were also some respondents who were identified directly by staff at those community agencies, and who were contacted by those staff persons, informed of the purposes of the study, and asked whether they would be interested in participation.

Another source of respondents was through appeals in the electronic and print media. While items about the project appeared in a number of local and ethnic community newspapers, one particular column in an English language daily newspaper, the Toronto Star, attracted the greatest amount of attention. In fact, several of those respondents who telephoned to volunteer to participate in the study mentioned that they had come forward after seeing the Toronto Star column and subsequently seeing or hearing some other announcement of the research project.

A final source of respondents was a so-called "snowball" sampling strategy, whereby respondents were asked in the screening interview whether they could recommend other individuals who fit the study criteria.

The sampling methods described above were the successful strategies. There were also some failed attempts. One of these involved stationing project staff outside various Metro Toronto area Canada Employment Centres, to look for men who arrived with a young child in tow. This procedure was abandoned after several days without locating the target population. Unemployed fathers, it seems, do not tend to bring their children along on trips to Canada Employment Centres.

The second, more direct (but still unsuccessful) approach involved attempts to obtain names and addresses of unemployed males from union-sponsored programs serving the unemployed. It was reported that reasons of confidentiality prevented such organizations from either providing the project with names of unemployed individuals, or from contacting them directly, describing the project and asking them to contact the researchers if they were interested in participating in the study.

Possible Sources of Bias

There are some potential sources of bias inherent in these sampling procedures. First, the direct screening of men who appear in public with their young children biases the sample towards fathers with some degree of participation in child care, and some willingness to venture outside the home with their children. This technique would not serve to identify the father who chose not to provide any child care, nor would it reveal those isolated individuals who remain inside the home. This potential omission is, in fact, a serious weakness in the study's design. The unemployed father who stays at home with his young children, staring at the walls or the television screen, should be a key focus in a study of this sort. A sampling strategy that excludes systematically such individuals may minimize the hardships associated with fathers' unemployment.

It may also be the case that the use of respondents who were identified through community agencies may involve a bias towards individuals or families experiencing difficulty in coping with their circumstances. In this regard, however, it should be stressed that the community services and

agencies that assisted in publicizing the project -- community centres, immigrant women's programs, libraries, etc. -- were not agencies providing clinical services.

Finally, the use of respondents who volunteer to participate in a survey such as this involves an additional source of bias. It might well be expected that there would be significant differences between individuals who volunteer to be interviewed and those who do not. Those not exposed to the particular media carrying messages about the study might not even have learned of the appeal for volunteers.

In defense of the representativeness of the sample, however, it can be argued that some of these potential biases may counterbalance one another. Furthermore, as revealed in the description of the sample characteristics which follows, there is a considerable degree of variability in the sample. Finally, it can be argued that, to the degree that the sampling strategy is biased towards respondents who are coping with the stresses of unemployment, the study results portray a conservative estimate of the difficulties associated with paternal unemployment. It might reasonably be expected that replication of the study with a systematic, representative sample of the unemployed population -- such as a sample of U.I.C. recipients, or workers laid off by a particular employer -- would reveal problems of a considerably greater magnitude.

Data Collection

Each of the respondents was interviewed in person by a member of the project research team. In most cases the interviews were conducted in

respondents' homes. The few exceptions involved non-English language interviews which required the additional presence of an interpreter; these interviews were conducted in a local community facility.

The duration of interviews ranged from approximately forty-five minutes to three-and-one-half hours. The average interview took about one-and-one-half hours. An effort was made to discourage other adult members of the respondent's household from being present during the interview. It was felt that the presence of observers might influence the responses to questions. In most cases this effort was successful. In the five cases when it was not, and a respondent insisted that a spouse or partner be present, that observer was discouraged from any active participation in the interview.

Research Instrument

The survey used a questionnaire with both structured and open-ended questions. Areas covered in the interview included socio-demographic background of respondent and spouse or partner, employment and unemployment histories, attitudes and expectations about employment, joblessness, family life and household responsibilities. The interview dealt with children's behaviour, joint activities between father and child, and child care arrangements. In order to minimize the amount of data collected, the interview focused on the behaviour and activities of only one pre-school child in the family. If a family had more than one child under six, questions were asked about the youngest child.

Structured questions were used to obtain basic socio-demographic background information for respondents and their families. A detailed

employment history was documented for each respondent using a monthly calendar reaching five years back in time. This calendar format was used to indicate the start and the end dates of respondent's employment and unemployment history up to and including the month in which the interview occurred.

In addition, the questionnaire included a large number of scale items, many of which were drawn from or based on a series of parenting behaviour scales currently in use in a cross-national survey of child rearing developed by Professors Moncrieff Cochran and Urie Bronfenbrenner at Cornell University. These scales were used to assess a variety of factors, including: respondent's attitudes toward employment and parenting; degree of their participation in various household tasks; feelings about child care arrangements currently in use; amount of involvement in joint activities with children; characteristics of the children; extent of respondent's involvement and perceived competence in various parenting activities; and the respondent's views on the relative importance of these various parenting activities.

Following is a brief description of the Cochran-Bronfenbrenner scales. One scale consisted of 19 items describing parenting activities, including keeping your temper, disciplining your child, listening to your child, teaching your child to be fair. Fathers were asked to rate their performance of these activities using a 7-point scale. They were also asked to rate the same activities in terms of importance (also on a 7-point scale). There was a child description list consisting of 24 polar opposites, such as: calm - easily upset; happy - unhappy; co-operative - unco-operative;

hardworking - lazy. Fathers were asked to rate their child on a 7-point scale with each end representing the extreme negative or positive dimension. The joint activities scale consisted of 45 items -- we sing songs together, we play with toys together, we play outdoors together, we wash dishes together -- and fathers were asked to rate each activity in terms of whether they and their child engaged in it daily, a lot, once in a while or never. Satisfaction with child care arrangements was a 7-point scale constructed like the child description list -- good care of my child - poor care of my child, good effect on my child - bad effect on my child, makes life better for me - makes life worse for me. In all instances, fathers could answer "not applicable" for any given item. There was also a 16-item household activities list in which fathers were asked to identify who typically did housework, including mending, cooking, dish washing, picking up, and repairs. Fathers could check any combination of self, spouse/partner, child and other.

Fathers were also asked whether, since unemployment, they spent more, less, or the same amount of time in a variety of activities, including: sleeping, spending time with friends or former workmates, viewing television, performing chores. This series of questions was adapted from an interview currently being used by Professors Meg Luxton, Wally Seccombe and David Livingstone in a study of the family life of steelworkers in Hamilton, Ontario.

Throughout the interview, open-ended questions were used to probe respondents' feelings and attitudes on each of the major topics. Verbatim responses were recorded for each of the following: feelings about unemployment, including particular aspects liked and disliked; feelings about the work situation of spouse/partner; assessment of current child care arrange-

ments and general preferences with regard to child care; usual sources of help or information on matters relating to child care; assessment of the service needs of unemployed fathers; and description and evaluation of self and spouse as a parent.

Data Analysis

A correlational analysis was done on the structured background and demographic information and the data obtained from the scales. Other information, such as degree of fathers' involvement in various household activities, was tabulated. Open ended questions were analyzed by means of content analysis involving tabulation of particular themes and key words.

APPENDIX B

TABLES

TABLE 1

Sources of Sampled Respondents
(n=30)

Direct screening	14
Community outreach	9
Media appeal	4
"Snowball" sampling	3

TABLE 2

Educational Level of
Currently or Recently Unemployed Fathers
(n=30)

Highest Level of Education	Number
Some elementary school	1
Completed elementary school	2
Some high school	5
Completed high school	6
Some community college	2
Completed community college	3
Some university	4
Completed Bachelor's degree	3
Completed Master's degree	2
Completed professional degree	2

TABLE 3

Total Annual Family Income Before and After Fathers' Unemployment

Total Annual Family Income	Before Unemployment (Number of Families) (n=30)	After Unemployment (Number of Families) (n=29)*
Less than $4,999	-	3
$5,000 - $9,999	4	5
$10,000 - $14,999	6	7
$15,000 - $19,999	4	2
$20,000 - $24,999	-	7
$25,000 - $29,999	3	2
$30,000 - $34,999	3	-
$35,000 - $39,999	4	1
$40,000 - $44,999	2	1
$45,000 and over	4	1

*Missing data for one respondent.

Table 4

Most Recent Occupation of
Currently or Recently Unemployed Fathers
(n=30)

Occupational Category	Number
Professional/technical	4
Managerial/supervisory	2
Clerical	1
Sales	5
Service	3
Skilled trades	6
Semi-skilled and unskilled work	9

TABLE 5

Reason for Termination of Most Recent Job
(n=30)

Reason	Number
Lay-off	13
Termination	4
End of contract	6
Quit	5
Injury, health problem	2

Table 6

Relationship between demographic and parenting variables for unemployed and recently employed fathers
(N=30 except for the variable "unemployment is good for child" where N=24 -- only currently unemployed)

	Number of months unemployed	Age of Child	Education	Income	Satisfaction with child care arrangements	Competence at Parenting	Importance of Parenting	Description of Child	Participation in joint activities	Unemployment good for child
Number of months unemployed										
Age of Child	.25									
Education	-.12	.05								
Income	-.16	.27	.56***							
Satisfaction with child care arrangements	.18	.14	-.20	-.39*						
Competence at parenting	-.10	.05	-.27	-.30	.74***					
Importance of parenting	-.15	.17	.04	-.02	.61***	.59***				
Description of child	-.43**	.16	.39*	.22	.27	.35^{x}	.48***			
Participation in joint activities	.01	-.14	.27	.12	.01	.06	-.11	.11		
Unemployment good for child	-.20	-.14	.30	.28	.08	.31	.30	.30	.60***	

***$p < .01$

**$p < .02$

*$p < .05$

$^{x}p < .10$

Table 7

Relationship between demographic and parenting variables for primary caretakers/non-primary caretakers (N=16/14 except for variable "unemployment is good for child" where N=13/11)

	Number of months unemployed	Age of child	Education	Income	Satisfaction with child care arrangements	Competence at parenting	Importance of parenting	Description of child	Participation in joint activities	Unemployment good for child
Number of months unemployed										
Age of child	-.13/.56*									
Education	-.18/-.07	.45/-.37								
Income	-.41/.10	.20/.44	.84**/.27							
Satisfaction with child care arrangements	.03/.54^{x}	.06/-.28	-.20/-.33	-.35/-.39						
Competence at parenting	-.32/.19	.00/.14	-.23/-.41	-.20/-.53	.81**/.51					
Importance of parenting	-.60*/.23	.28/.04	.20/-.16	.30/-.44	.56*/.77**	.62*/.58^{x}				
Description of child	-.61*/-.25	.28/.06	.30/.52	.36/.10	-.36/.15	.49/-.09	.78**/-.02			
Participation in joint activities	-.12/.11	-.01/-.28	.04/.47	.09/.26	.08/-.17	.26/-.36	.07/-.34	-.01/.27		
Unemployment good for child	-.84**/.21	-.25/-.16	.07/.49	.23/.35	.13/-.04	.47/.02	.39/.18	.47/-.03	.56^{x}/.64^{x}	

**p <.01

*p <.02

^{x}p <.05